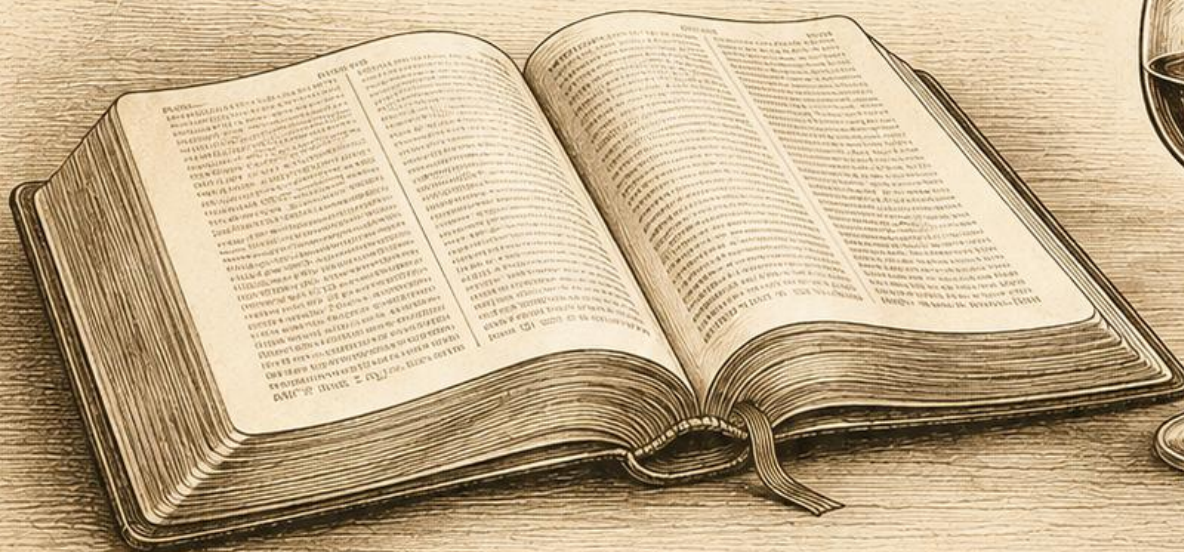




REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

IS DRINKING A LITTLE ALCOHOL OK?

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23-33



SERMON & PASTOR'S COMMENTARY
DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY
PASTOR & TEACHER

Is Drinking a Little Alcohol OK?

Aloha, church family.

It is good to gather together around the Word of God.

If this is your first time with us, we are especially glad that you are here.

At Reason Together Church, we believe honest questions are not enemies of faith.

They are often the doorway through which we begin to understand what God has actually said.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Before we begin, let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for giving us Your Word.

Thank You that we do not have to build our faith upon traditions, assumptions or personal opinions.

Teach us to hear everything You have said.

Keep us from adding rules You did not give.

Keep us from using Christian liberty as an excuse for foolishness.

Give us wisdom, honesty and love for the people who are watching our lives.

Help us examine not only what we are permitted to do, but what will glorify You and help others come closer to Jesus Christ.

Speak to us through Your Word today.

We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Our primary Scripture is found in First Corinthians, chapter ten, beginning with verse twenty-three.

I will be reading from the King James Version.

The Bible says,

“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

“Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.”

Then, beginning again at verse thirty-one,

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God:”

“Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”

May God bless the reading of His Word.

Before we continue, let me briefly mention giving.

We do not pass a plate and we never want a guest to feel pressured to give.

If you are visiting from another church, please support your home church.

Giving here is simply an opportunity for our members to support the ministry God has entrusted to us.

If you are a first-time guest, our guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

We would be honored to stay in touch without placing you on a pressure list.

After the service, please join us in the Reason Together Café for a free cup of locally grown coffee.

By the way, and this does not come from the Bible, at this church, in addition to having the best Hawaiian-grown coffee in the world, we use the word COFFEE to stand for Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere. That is not part of the Study this morning. I just thought I would add that in.

That brings me to the reminder that at our café, there are always free refills on conversations.

Our question today sounds simple.

Is drinking a little alcohol OK?

That question usually creates an immediate second question.

How much is a little?

Is a little one glass of wine with dinner?

Is a little one beer at a cookout?

Is a little whatever amount does not make a person fall down?

Is a little whatever amount allows someone to say, “I am not drunk”?

Many people want the Bible to provide a number.

They want a line printed on the side of the glass.

Below this line, you are fine.

Above this line, you have sinned.

But the Bible gives us something more searching than a number.
The Bible asks what alcohol is doing to us.
The Bible asks what our choice may do to another person.
The Bible asks what our conduct communicates about Jesus Christ.
And the Bible asks whether we can honestly do this to the glory of God.
The question is not merely, “Am I allowed to do this?”
Sometimes the more important question is, “What might happen if I do?”
Christians have disagreed about alcohol for generations.
Some churches teach that every consumption of alcohol is sinful.
They say that faithful Christians must abstain completely.
Other Christians say the only sin is becoming obviously drunk.
As long as they can walk, talk and remember where they parked the car, they assume there is no spiritual concern.
But our responsibility is not to defend either side.
Our responsibility is to open the Bible and let it speak.
We must not condemn what Scripture permits.
We must not minimize what Scripture warns can destroy us.
Wine appears throughout the Bible.
It appears in connection with celebration.
It appears in connection with medicine.
It appears in offerings.
It appears in foolish decisions.
It appears in violence, immorality and judgment.
The presence of wine alone does not tell us whether the conduct is righteous or sinful.
We have to read the context.
Some people try to solve the issue by saying every favorable reference means unfermented grape juice and every unfavorable reference means alcoholic wine.
That may make the question easier, but it does not deal honestly with all the passages.
We do not protect the Bible by making it say more than it says.
We honor the Bible by accepting everything it says.
One of the most important verses for our question is First Timothy 5:23.

Paul told Timothy,

“Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake and thine often infirmities.”

Notice the wording.

Paul said, “a little wine.”

He gave Timothy a specific purpose.

In the ancient world, clean drinking water could not always be taken for granted.

Water could contain the kinds of contamination that produced stomach trouble and recurring illness.

Wine was commonly mixed with water, and the wine could make that water more suitable to drink and reduce some of the danger associated with contaminated water.

For that reason, many Bible teachers believe Timothy’s repeated stomach problems may have been connected to the water he was drinking and that Paul advised him to add a little wine.

The Bible does not specifically tell us that Timothy’s water was contaminated, so we should recognize that as reasonable historical background rather than claim it as something the verse explicitly says.

What the verse does tell us is that Timothy had been drinking water only, that he suffered from frequent infirmities and that Paul recommended a little wine for a practical health-related purpose.

He referred to Timothy’s stomach and his frequent illnesses.

This verse is not a command for every Christian to begin drinking wine.

Paul was not telling Timothy that a glass of wine was necessary for Christian maturity.

He was addressing a particular need.

But this verse does establish something important.

Wine could have a legitimate use.

Paul would never prescribe a little adultery.

He would never recommend a little idolatry.

He would never tell Timothy to steal a little for the sake of his health.

If every use of wine were inherently sinful, Paul could not have told Timothy to use a little.

The Bible gives us another example in Proverbs 31.

The mother of King Lemuel told her son,

“It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink:”

“Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted.”

A king was responsible for justice.

Other people’s lives could be changed by his decisions.

He needed a clear mind.

Alcohol could cause him to forget the law and pervert judgment.

But the next verse says,

“Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts.”

“Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.”

The substance had not changed.

The person, purpose and circumstances had changed.

For the king who needed to render judgment, alcohol presented a danger.

For the person who was perishing in severe misery, strong drink could be given as an act of compassion to dull the suffering.

At the crucifixion, Mark 15:23 says,

“And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.”

Jesus refused it.

He chose to face the cross with complete awareness.

His refusal does not mean compassionate relief was inherently sinful.

It means He chose not to receive it in that moment.

These passages show us that the Bible does not evaluate alcohol by the bottle alone.

It evaluates purpose.

It evaluates effect.

It evaluates responsibility.

It evaluates the setting.

Deuteronomy 14:26 mentions wine and strong drink during a time of rejoicing before the Lord.

Psalms 104:15 speaks of “wine that maketh glad the heart of man.”

Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

We do not need to pretend that every favorable reference was merely ordinary grape juice.

Drinking alcohol is not automatically identified as sin in every circumstance.

But that does not end the study.

It begins the study.

Biblical permission is real.

But Biblical permission is only the beginning of the Christian's decision.

Proverbs 20:1 gives alcohol a warning label.

“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”

Notice that the verse does not merely warn about being unconscious.

It warns about being deceived.

Alcohol can affect a person's judgment before that person recognizes the change.

Someone can sincerely believe, “I am fine,” while everyone else can see that he is not fine.

Alcohol can impair the very judgment a person is using to decide whether his judgment is impaired.

That is part of its deception.

Proverbs 23 asks,

“Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?”

The answer is,

“They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.”

Then the warning continues,

“Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright.”

“At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.”

“Thine eyes shall behold strange women, and thine heart shall utter perverse things.”

The chapter ends with the person waking after being struck and beaten, yet saying,

“I will seek it yet again.”

That is not a harmless picture.

It is a picture of sorrow, injury, distorted desire and repeated craving.

The first recorded drunkenness in Scripture involved Noah.

Noah was a righteous man who had obeyed God through extraordinary circumstances.

Yet Genesis 9 records that he became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.

Lot became so intoxicated that he did not understand what was happening around him.

Nabal held a feast and became “very drunken.”

Belshazzar drank while profaning the vessels taken from God's temple.

The Bible never presents drunkenness as innocent amusement.
It repeatedly shows judgment weakened, dignity abandoned and sin invited.
Something does not have to be forbidden in every circumstance before it can become dangerous in yours.

Ephesians 5:15 says,
“See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.”

Verse seventeen says,
“Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.”

Then verse eighteen says,
“And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.”

Drunkenness is plainly forbidden.
There should be no argument about that.

Galatians lists drunkenness among the works of the flesh.
First Corinthians warns that drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

The Bible does not say, “Do not drink too much unless it is a celebration.”
It does not say, “Drunkenness is acceptable as long as you are at home.”
It does not say, “It is fine if everyone else is doing it.”
It says, “Be not drunk with wine.”

But what does drunkenness mean?

Some people define it as the point where the room spins.
Some define it as the point where they can no longer walk straight.
Some define it as the point where they cannot remember what happened.

The Bible’s concern begins earlier than that.
The contrast in Ephesians is between the influence of wine and the filling of the Holy Spirit.
The Christian should never surrender to alcohol what belongs to the Holy Spirit.

Our judgment belongs to God.
Our words belong to God.
Our conduct belongs to God.
Our bodies belong to God.
Our influence belongs to God.

“I only had a little” is not a defense if that little changed our judgment or diminished our self-control.

The same amount may not affect every person in the same way.

That is one reason Scripture does not give one universal number.

Personal honesty cannot be replaced by arithmetic.

The question is not whether I can still stand.

The question is whether I am still walking in wisdom.

There is another Biblical line.

First Corinthians 6:12 says,

“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”

Alcohol has crossed a line when it begins to master us.

That does not always begin with someone drinking every day.

It may begin when a person believes he needs alcohol to relax.

It may appear when someone cannot imagine a celebration without it.

It may appear when a person repeatedly drinks more than intended.

It may appear when someone hides how much was consumed.

It may appear when a person becomes defensive every time someone expresses concern.

It may appear when the person says, “I can quit whenever I want,” but never chooses to prove it.

It may appear when alcohol continues to be used after it has damaged responsibilities, relationships or testimony.

When I can no longer comfortably say no, the question is no longer whether I am free to say yes.

Christian freedom never means becoming a servant to the thing I claim I am free to use.

Then we must consider conscience.

Romans 14:22 says,

“Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.”

Verse twenty-three concludes,

“For whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”

If a Christian believes drinking would be wrong and drinks anyway, that person is not acting in faith.

He is acting against his conscience.

No one should pressure another Christian to drink.

No one should make fun of someone who orders water, coffee or a soft drink.

No one should suggest that drinking proves maturity.

No one should say, "Come on, one will not hurt you."

You may not know what that person survived.

You may not know what one drink could awaken.

You may not know the prayers that person has prayed or the promises that person has made before God.

Refusing alcohol does not make someone immature.

Abstinence can be a thoughtful act of wisdom, devotion and self-knowledge.

At the same time, Christians should be careful about condemning another believer where Scripture permits liberty.

If the Bible does not call every use sin, we should not claim greater authority than the Bible.

We can choose abstinence without inventing a command that God did not give.

We can recognize liberty without insisting that everyone exercise it.

Christian liberty does not require me to use every freedom I possess.

Romans 14:21 takes us beyond our own conscience.

Paul wrote,

"It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak."

My liberty must never become more important than another person's spiritual welfare.

One drink may mean very little to me.

That same drink may represent years of bondage to someone sitting across the table.

One person may be able to stop after a small amount.

Another person may be fighting an urge that has destroyed a family, a career or years of life.

We may not know who is quietly struggling.

Love does not stand in front of a struggling person and announce, "I have a right to drink this."

Love asks, "Could my choice make this person weaker?"

If it could, love puts the glass down.

Christian liberty asks what I may do.

Christian love asks what my choice may do to someone else.

But there is another concern that reaches beyond the person sitting at our table.

It is our Christian witness.

Return to First Corinthians 10:31.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

Paul did not stop with believers.

He said,

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God.”

He included people inside the church and people outside the church.

Then he explained his purpose.

“Not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.”

Paul connected eating and drinking with the possibility of people being saved.

That brings our question into an ordinary store.

Suppose I walk into a store and purchase a bottle of wine.

The clerk recognizes me.

Perhaps the clerk knows I am a pastor.

Perhaps the clerk simply knows I am a Christian.

Perhaps we have talked about church.

Perhaps I invited that clerk to a service.

Perhaps another church member enters the same store.

The clerk knows that person as a Christian coworker, neighbor or friend.

The clerk sees the bottle placed on the counter.

What does the clerk think?

The clerk does not know the careful Biblical study behind the purchase.

The clerk does not know whether the Christian intends to drink a small amount with dinner.

The clerk may only think, “Christians say one thing and do another.”

The clerk may think, “That pastor is a hypocrite.”

The clerk may think, “If Christians drink, there cannot be anything wrong with the way I drink.”

The Christian may not actually be committing hypocrisy.

The Bible may permit that small amount.

But our actions can communicate something we never intended to say.

This principle does not apply only to pastors.

Every Christian represents Jesus Christ.

Our families watch us.

Our coworkers watch us.

Our neighbors watch us.

Young believers watch us.

People who are not yet believers watch us.

A pastor may be more readily recognized, but the responsibility to represent Christ belongs to every believer.

First Timothy says that a pastor must have a good report of those who are outside.

But First Corinthians tells the whole church not to seek its own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

We must be careful here.

We cannot prevent every misunderstanding.

We cannot organize our entire lives around every conclusion someone might possibly draw.

Jesus was accused of being “a gluttonous man, and a winebibber.”

That accusation appears in Matthew 11 and again in Luke 7.

Jesus was describing a generation that had rejected both John the Baptist and Him, even though their outward practices were very different.

John came living an unusually disciplined life, neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and the people said, “He hath a devil.”

Then the Son of man came eating and drinking, sitting at tables and speaking with ordinary people, including publicans and sinners.

The same critics said, “Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!”

The word winebibber was not a compliment or a neutral description. They were accusing Jesus of being a habitual drinker or drunkard.

Jesus was not admitting the accusation. He was exposing the inconsistency of people who condemned John for abstaining and condemned Jesus for eating and drinking among the people He came to save.

Nothing John did would satisfy them, and nothing Jesus did would satisfy them.

The accusation was false and malicious.

Living faithfully will not prevent people from criticizing us.

We are not called to become prisoners of every imagined opinion.

But we are called to take foreseeable and avoidable harm seriously.

Alcohol is not necessary.

Our witness for Christ is.

If I surrender something unnecessary and protect my witness, I have lost very little.

If I insist upon my liberty and damage the credibility of the Gospel in someone's mind, the possible cost is far greater.

We cannot say with certainty that one purchase would be the reason someone never accepts Christ.

Salvation is the work of God, and each person is responsible for responding to the Gospel.

But Paul still said he was "not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved."

He cared enough to remove unnecessary obstacles.

So the Christian must ask,

"Even if this drink is Biblically permissible for me, what might my choice teach someone who knows that I belong to Christ?"

And then we must ask an even harder question.

"Is this drink worth even the possibility of placing an unnecessary obstacle between another person and Jesus Christ?"

For me, if I sincerely believe that purchase may damage my witness, the answer is no.

It is not worth it.

The wine may be Biblically permissible while the decision is still spiritually unprofitable.

Christian liberty may describe what I am allowed to do.

Christian witness asks what another person may learn from watching me do it.

That brings us back to First Corinthians 10:23.

"All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient."

Something can be lawful without being expedient.

Something can be permissible without being profitable.

Then Paul said,

“All things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”

The word edify means to build up.

The Christian question is not only, “Can I?”

The Christian question is also, “Will this build anyone up?”

Before drinking, we should ask several questions.

Is this beginning to control me?

Could this impair my judgment?

Is my conscience completely clear before God?

Could this weaken or tempt another person?

What might this communicate about Jesus Christ?

Can I honestly do this to the glory of God?

Is this drink important enough to justify the possible consequences?

If any answer raises a serious warning, then a little may already be too much.

Some people will hear this message and conclude that they possess Biblical liberty to drink a small amount.

That may be an honest conclusion.

Others will conclude that the wisest choice for them is complete abstinence.

That may also be an honest conclusion.

The goal is not to make every Christian reach the same personal practice where Scripture allows liberty.

The goal is to make every Christian submit that practice to Jesus Christ.

Do not drink merely because others drink.

Do not abstain merely so you can feel more righteous than someone who does not.

Do not hide behind liberty.

Do not hide behind legalism.

Open the Bible.

Examine your heart.

Consider your influence.

And be willing to surrender anything that interferes with following Christ or helping another person follow Him.

There may be someone listening today who is no longer deciding whether to have a little.

Alcohol already has power over your life.

You have said, "I will stop tomorrow."

Tomorrow has come many times.

You have hidden bottles.

You have hidden receipts.

You have apologized for words you do not remember saying.

You have promised people you love that it would never happen again.

And then it happened again.

The Bible does not minimize drunkenness.

But the Bible also does not tell us that the drunkard is beyond the reach of grace.

First Corinthians 6:10 says that drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

That warning is serious.

But verse eleven says,

"And such were some of you."

Were.

That condition did not have to remain their identity.

Paul continued,

"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

The Gospel offers more than the command to try harder.

Jesus offers forgiveness.

Jesus offers cleansing.

Jesus offers freedom.

Jesus offers a new identity.

Alcohol may have become part of your history.

Through Jesus Christ, it does not have to control your future.

Seeking help is not evidence of weak faith.

It can be an act of truth, humility and courage.

The church should not be a place where people hide until their struggle destroys them.

The church should be a place where people can tell the truth, receive prayer and walk toward freedom with others beside them.

So let us answer the title plainly.

Is drinking a little alcohol OK?

Drinking a little alcohol is not automatically a sin.

The Bible recognizes legitimate uses and does not command universal abstinence for every believer in every circumstance.

But drinking becomes sinful when it leads to drunkenness.

It becomes sinful when it gains mastery over us.

It becomes sinful when it violates the conscience.

It becomes sinful when it weakens another person.

And a drink may be Biblically permissible while still being unwise because of what it communicates through our Christian witness.

You may possess the liberty to drink a little alcohol.

You may also decide that the wisest, most loving and most Christ-honoring use of that liberty is not to drink it.

The Bible does not merely ask how much is in your glass.

It asks what controls your life.

It asks how your choice affects another person.

It asks what your conduct communicates about Jesus Christ.

And it asks whether what you eat, what you drink and whatsoever you do can truly be done to the glory of God.

If you have never accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, the invitation today is not merely to change what is in your glass.

The invitation is to give Christ your life.

Jesus died for your sins.

He was buried.

He rose again.

He offers forgiveness to everyone who comes to Him in faith.

You do not clean yourself up before coming to Jesus.

You come to Jesus, and He begins making you new.

If you are already a believer, ask the Holy Spirit to show you whether any liberty has become more important than love, wisdom or witness.

Be willing to place it before God.

No drink is worth mastery.

No drink is worth weakening someone else.

No drink is worth damaging the witness God has entrusted to you.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the honesty and balance of Your Word.

Thank You that You tell us the truth about both liberty and danger.

Help us refuse drunkenness and every form of bondage.

Give us wisdom to recognize when something permissible is not profitable.

Give us love that values another person more than our own preferences.

Guard our witness before believers and unbelievers.

For anyone struggling under the power of alcohol, bring conviction without hopelessness.

Give that person courage to tell the truth and seek help.

Remind us that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness, cleansing and freedom.

For anyone who has never trusted Christ, draw that person to the Savior today.

Let everything we eat, everything we drink and everything we do bring glory to You.

We ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Thank you for reasoning together through the Word of God.

Please join us in the Reason Together Café.

If you have a question, I would be honored to continue the conversation with you.

To our first-time guests, Aloha Nui Loa.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen.

REASON TOGETHER STUDIES

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

IS DRINKING A LITTLE ALCOHOL OK?

1 Corinthians 10:23–33

*“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do,
do all to the glory of God.” 1 Corinthians 10:31*

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

Commentary in Brief

CENTRAL CONCLUSION Drinking a little alcohol is not automatically a sin. The Bible permits legitimate uses and never gives a universal command requiring every believer to abstain. That permission is only the beginning of the decision. Drunkenness is forbidden, mastery is incompatible with Christian freedom, conscience must remain clear, love must protect the vulnerable and witness must seek the spiritual good of people who are watching.

The sermon answers a familiar question but refuses to answer it with a simple drinking rule. Some Christians begin with prohibition and try to make every favorable wine passage refer to unfermented grape juice. Others begin with liberty and treat everything short of obvious drunkenness as acceptable. Neither approach receives everything Scripture says.

The Bible recognizes wine in settings of celebration, medicine, worship and compassionate relief. The same Bible calls wine a mocker, describes the misery of those who tarry long at it, condemns drunkenness and warns believers not to be mastered by any lawful thing. The apparent tension is not a problem to solve. It is the balance Scripture gives us.

This commentary expands the reasoning behind the sermon. It examines why “a little” cannot be reduced to a universal number, how the principal wine passages should be read, what Christian liberty does and does not mean and why the ordinary act of purchasing a bottle can become a question of Gospel witness. It also separates Biblical commands from a pastor’s personal judgment so that wisdom is not turned into law and liberty is not turned into carelessness.

1. Begin with the Question Beneath the Question

“How Much Can I Have?”

The title sounds as though the study will measure alcohol. A listener may expect a permitted number of drinks, a percentage or a line between sober and drunk. Scripture does not provide one universal measurement. That silence is not a defect. It forces the believer to ask a more searching question than how close he may come to a boundary without admitting he crossed it.

The same amount can affect two people differently. Body size, food, medication, physical condition, drinking history and tolerance can change the immediate effect. A person with a history of dependence faces a danger another person may not recognize. A quantity that does not produce visible staggering can still alter inhibition, reaction, tone of voice and judgment.

The Moral Question

The Bible therefore asks what the alcohol is doing, not only how much is present. Is judgment beginning to change? Is the person using alcohol or depending upon it? Can the person decline without resentment? Is conscience clear? Could another person be weakened? What does the choice communicate about Christ? Can it honestly be offered to God’s glory?

READING PRINCIPLE When Scripture does not give a universal number, do not replace Biblical wisdom with personal arithmetic. “I only had a little” is not a defense if that little changed judgment, weakened another person or compromised witness.

2. Let Every Wine Passage Keep Its Context

One Word Can Appear in Different Moral Settings

Some abstinence arguments divide Biblical wine vocabulary into two moral categories. Favorable references are said to mean fresh grape juice. Unfavorable references are said to mean fermented wine. That division is attractive because it produces a simple rule, but it does not arise naturally from all the texts. The Hebrew yayin and the Greek oinos can appear where wine is enjoyed, where it is prescribed and where it causes drunkenness.

The presence of wine does not settle the morality of the event. Context identifies the person, purpose, amount, effect and responsibility involved. Noah's wine is connected with drunkenness and shame. Timothy's little wine is connected with his stomach and frequent illnesses. Proverbs 31 warns a king away from alcohol while describing strong drink for a person ready to perish. The same broad subject appears, but the moral circumstances differ.

Do Not Protect Scripture by Rewriting It

A person may sincerely believe abstinence is the wisest Christian practice. That conclusion does not require making every positive reference into ordinary grape juice. Scripture is strong enough to be received as written. We honor it by permitting legitimate use where the text permits it and by sounding every warning with its full force.

INTERPRETIVE RULE Do not assign a meaning to “wine” merely because the passage is favorable or unfavorable. Establish meaning from vocabulary, setting, purpose and effect. Then allow the whole Biblical pattern to govern the conclusion.

3. “Use a Little Wine” in 1 Timothy 5:23

A Particular Instruction

Paul told Timothy, “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.” Every part of the sentence matters. Paul addresses Timothy personally. He specifies a little. He names Timothy's stomach and recurring infirmities. The instruction is practical rather than ceremonial and particular rather than universal.

The verse does not command every Christian to begin drinking. It does not suggest that wine proves maturity, masculinity or freedom. Timothy had apparently been using water only, and Paul advised a measured change for a stated need. A modern reader should not turn one apostolic instruction into a medical prescription detached from personal health and contemporary medical counsel.

What the Verse Establishes

The verse does establish that wine can have a legitimate use. Paul would not prescribe a little adultery, theft or idolatry for a troubled stomach. If every use of alcoholic wine were sinful by its very nature, the instruction would create a moral contradiction. The most natural conclusion is narrower: wine itself is not sinful in every possible use.

Historical Background and Its Limit

Water quality in the ancient world varied, and wine was commonly mixed with water. Fermented wine could reduce some danger associated with questionable water. Many teachers therefore connect Timothy's stomach trouble with the water he was drinking. That explanation is historically reasonable, but the verse never says his water was contaminated.

The distinction matters because Biblical teaching should separate revelation from reconstruction. The revealed facts are that Timothy used water, suffered recurring infirmities and received advice to use a little wine. Contaminated water may explain those facts, but it must not be preached as though Paul stated it.

EVIDENCE LIMIT Historical background may make a passage more understandable. It may not be promoted from a reasonable possibility to an inspired detail the passage never supplies.

4. Proverbs 31: The Person, Purpose and Responsibility

A King Must Preserve Judgment

The mother of King Lemuel says it is not for kings to drink wine or for princes to drink strong drink, "Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted." The concern is not that the substance becomes uniquely sinful in a palace. The king holds a responsibility that requires clear judgment because another person may suffer from his impaired decision.

This principle reaches beyond government. Anyone responsible for driving, supervising children, counseling a person in crisis, operating equipment, making medical decisions or responding to an emergency may face a similar wisdom requirement. A use that might be lawful in another setting can become reckless when the duty requires undiminished alertness.

Strong Drink for the Person Ready to Perish

The next verses say, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." In its immediate contrast, the passage recognizes a compassionate use intended to dull severe misery. The person, purpose and circumstances have changed. The language should not be expanded into a general command to treat sadness, disappointment or ordinary stress with alcohol.

Jesus Refused the Wine Mingled with Myrrh

Mark 15:23 records that Jesus was offered wine mingled with myrrh and refused it. The mixture appears in the setting of crucifixion and suffering. Jesus chose to face the cross without receiving it. His refusal displays His deliberate willingness to endure the cup the Father had given Him. It does not prove that compassionate pain relief is inherently sinful.

CONTEXT PRINCIPLE The Bible does not evaluate alcohol by the bottle alone. It considers purpose, effect, responsibility and setting. The same substance can be unwise for the judge who must remain clear and compassionate for the person enduring extreme suffering.

5. Permission Is Real, but It Is Not a Recommendation

Celebration and Provision

Deuteronomy 14:26 includes wine and strong drink in a festival setting of rejoicing before the Lord. Psalm 104:15 speaks of “wine that maketh glad the heart of man.” John 2 records Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding. These passages make a universal prohibition difficult to sustain. They do not make alcohol necessary for rejoicing and they do not command a Christian to exercise the permission.

A person can acknowledge that the Bible permits a small amount without becoming an advocate for drinking. Christian liberty identifies what may be lawful. It does not declare that every lawful act is beneficial for every believer or every setting. Paul’s own language makes this distinction explicit: “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient.”

The Difference Between Permission and Promotion

When a church teaches that every use is automatically sinful, it risks adding a command Scripture does not give. When a church emphasizes liberty without equal attention to danger, it risks giving moral cover to people who are already deceiving themselves. Faithful teaching must be balanced enough to disappoint both legalism and self-justification.

MINISTRY POSTURE Reason Together Church can acknowledge Biblical permission without encouraging alcohol use. It can honor abstinence without declaring every believer who drinks a small amount disobedient.

6. Wine Is a Mocker Before the Person Admits He Is Drunk

The Deception of Proverbs 20:1

Proverbs says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.” The word deceived moves the warning earlier than obvious intoxication. Alcohol can diminish the very judgment a person uses to evaluate whether judgment has diminished. The person may be sincere when saying, “I am fine,” but sincerity does not restore accuracy.

This is one reason self-assessment after drinking is unreliable. A person may notice only the absence of extreme symptoms and fail to recognize smaller changes in patience, volume, risk, speech or reaction. Wisdom makes decisions before judgment is affected rather than trusting affected judgment to announce when the danger has arrived.

The Progression of Proverbs 23

Proverbs 23:29–35 moves through woe, sorrow, contention, babbling, wounds, redness of eyes, distorted perception and perverse speech. It ends with the injured person saying, “I will seek it yet again.” That closing sentence is one of Scripture’s clearest pictures of craving. Harm has occurred, but desire still argues for repetition.

The passage also warns against lingering and seeking mixed wine. The problem is not a single isolated effect. It is a pattern of attention, pursuit and return. Alcohol becomes part of how the person anticipates relief, pleasure or belonging. By the time consequences are undeniable, the will may already be trained to excuse them.

WISDOM PRINCIPLE Something does not have to be forbidden in every circumstance before it can become dangerous in yours. The wise person takes the warning seriously before the consequences become dramatic.

7. Drunkenness, Influence and Mastery

“Be Not Drunk with Wine”

Ephesians 5 places the prohibition against drunkenness within a call to walk circumspectly, live wisely and understand the Lord’s will. The contrast is not simply between falling down and standing up. It is between being under wine’s influence and being filled with the Spirit. The Christian should never surrender to alcohol what belongs to the Holy Spirit.

Judgment belongs to God. Speech belongs to God. The body belongs to God. Conduct and influence belong to God. A person need not become unconscious before alcohol has affected something entrusted to the Lord. This is why “I could still walk” and “I remember everything” are inadequate spiritual tests.

The Mastery Test of 1 Corinthians 6:12

Paul says, “I will not be brought under the power of any.” A habit may be gaining mastery when a person believes alcohol is needed to relax, cannot imagine celebration without it, regularly consumes more than intended, hides the amount, becomes defensive when questioned or continues after responsibilities and relationships are damaged.

Dependence does not always introduce itself with a daily bottle. It often begins by becoming the preferred answer to stress, sleep, loneliness or discomfort. The question is not merely whether the Christian can stop in theory. It is whether the Christian remains willing and able to say no without feeling deprived of something necessary.

MASTERY TEST When I can no longer comfortably say no, the question is no longer whether I am free to say yes. Christian freedom never means becoming a servant to the thing I claim I am free to use.

8. Conscience Cannot Be Borrowed

“Whatsoever Is Not of Faith Is Sin”

Romans 14:22–23 addresses the believer’s own conviction before God. A Christian who believes drinking would be wrong cannot borrow another believer’s conscience and drink merely because someone else says it is permitted. Acting against conscience trains the heart to disregard what it presently believes God requires.

A conscience can be misinformed and may need instruction. It is not infallible. Yet the proper path is to educate conscience through Scripture, not to violate it through pressure. A believer should never be mocked for ordering water, coffee or a soft drink. Refusal may reflect recovery history, medical wisdom, family experience, personal devotion or simple preference.

Liberty Does Not Need to Be Proved

No one demonstrates maturity by consuming something another believer declines. The sentence “one will not hurt you” presumes knowledge the speaker does not possess. One drink may awaken an old pattern, violate a private commitment or create a conflict with medication. Love leaves the decision free from ridicule and social pressure.

PASTORAL ASSURANCE Abstinence can be a thoughtful act of wisdom, devotion and self-knowledge. A Christian does not need to exercise every liberty in order to prove that the liberty exists.

9. Stumbling Is More Than Disagreement

Romans 14:21

Paul says it is good not to eat flesh, drink wine or do anything by which a brother stumbles, is offended or is made weak. In this context, offense is not merely dislike. The danger is that another believer may be drawn into conduct that violates conscience, revives bondage or weakens faith.

This distinction prevents two opposite errors. One person should not control every Christian’s conduct by announcing personal offense at anything disliked. At the same time, the person claiming liberty must not dismiss real spiritual vulnerability as someone else’s problem. Love asks what the choice may do to the person who is present.

The Recovering Person at the Table

One glass may represent very little to one Christian and years of bondage to another. The stronger believer may know he can stop. The recovering person may be spending the entire meal

trying not to begin. In that setting, announcing a right to drink displays a poor understanding of strength. Biblical strength is shown by the ability to surrender preference for another person's good.

CHRISTIAN LOVE Christian liberty asks what I may do. Christian love asks what my choice may do to someone else. If the exercise of liberty could make a vulnerable person weaker, love puts the glass down.

10. The Witness at the Store Counter

A Lawful Purchase Can Send an Unintended Message

The store-clerk example became one of the most important developments in this study. A Christian places a bottle on the counter. The clerk recognizes the person as a pastor, church member, coworker, neighbor or someone who has extended an invitation to church. The clerk sees the purchase but does not see the intended amount, the dinner table, the conscience or the Biblical reasoning behind it.

The clerk may conclude that Christians are hypocrites. The clerk may use the purchase to justify a very different pattern of drinking. Neither conclusion proves the Christian actually acted hypocritically. A small amount may be Biblically permissible. The point is that public conduct communicates with incomplete context, and the observer may learn something the Christian never intended to teach.

First Corinthians 10 Makes Witness Part of the Decision

Paul says to do all to the glory of God and to give no offense to Jews, Gentiles or the church. He explains that he seeks the profit of many "that they may be saved." Eating and drinking are therefore connected to people inside the church and people who do not yet believe. The believer's freedom exists within a mission larger than personal preference.

No one can declare with certainty that a single purchase will cause someone never to accept Christ. Salvation is God's work, and every hearer is responsible for responding to the Gospel. Yet Paul still removes unnecessary obstacles because he cares about the possibility that people may be saved. The Christian cannot control another person's conclusion, but he can consider whether an optional act is worth a foreseeable risk to credibility.

WITNESS PRINCIPLE Christian liberty may describe what I am allowed to do. Christian witness asks what another person may learn from watching me do it. Alcohol is optional. Our witness for Christ is not.

11. The Principle Applies to Every Christian

Pastors Are Visible, but They Are Not the Only Witnesses

The original question focused on a pastor being recognized while purchasing alcohol. First Timothy 3:7 requires a bishop to have a good report from those outside. A pastor's public

conduct carries special visibility because people may connect one action with the credibility of the church and its teaching.

The user rightly expanded the principle. A clerk may recognize a church member, not a pastor. Children watch parents. Coworkers watch coworkers. Neighbors, young believers, extended family and people who have declined a church invitation all form conclusions from ordinary conduct. Every Christian bears the name of Christ.

Public Responsibility Without Performance

Christian witness does not mean constructing a false image or hiding lawful behavior so that people will think the Christian is better than he is. It means living transparently under the lordship of Christ and surrendering optional conduct when love and mission provide a good reason. The aim is not reputation for its own sake. The aim is to avoid placing needless obstacles before the Gospel.

UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY A pastor may be more readily recognized, but the responsibility to represent Christ belongs to every believer. The store counter is only one example of the many ordinary places where theology becomes visible.

12. Jesus Was Called a Winebibber

The Accusation Was Malicious

Matthew 11 and Luke 7 record Jesus describing a generation that rejected both John the Baptist and Him. John came neither eating bread nor drinking wine in the ordinary social pattern, and critics said he had a devil. Jesus came eating and drinking among people, and they called Him a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

Jesus was not admitting gluttony or drunkenness. He was exposing critics who could not be satisfied because their real problem was not the outward practice. John's abstinence became evidence against him, and Jesus' table fellowship became evidence against Him. The accusations were inconsistent because the rejection had already been decided.

What the Passage Does and Does Not Teach

The passage shows that perfect conduct cannot prevent every false accusation. Christians are not called to organize life around every conclusion another person might imagine. If witness meant preventing all criticism, Jesus would have failed the standard. He did not.

The passage does not eliminate wise restraint. Jesus endured slander while carrying out the necessary mission of entering people's homes, eating with sinners and bringing the message of the kingdom near. An optional drink is not necessary in the same way. We should not use Jesus' willingness to endure false accusation as permission to ignore avoidable confusion about something we can easily surrender.

BALANCED JUDGMENT We cannot prevent every misunderstanding and should not become prisoners of imagined opinions. We are still called to take foreseeable and avoidable harm seriously.

13. When Abstinence Becomes the Wisest Use of Liberty

Biblical Command and Pastoral Judgment

The Biblical conclusion is that every use of alcohol is not automatically sin. A pastor must state that conclusion honestly even if his personal practice is abstinence. Personal wisdom becomes legalism when it is presented as a command God gave to every believer. Biblical liberty becomes selfishness when it is treated as a reason never to surrender personal preference.

The sermon therefore distinguishes the rule from the pastoral judgment. The rule comes from Scripture: do not be drunk, do not be mastered, do not violate conscience, do not weaken another person and do all to God's glory. The pastoral judgment considers how those commands apply to a particular life and ministry.

A Personal Ministry Decision

For a recognized pastor, buying or drinking alcohol may create questions that require more explanation than the act is worth. The same may be true for any believer whose family, workplace or relationships make the witness risk foreseeable. The decision to abstain in that circumstance does not mean the bottle became universally sinful. It means love, prudence and mission outweighed the value of exercising the liberty.

There is no loss of Christian freedom when a believer freely chooses not to use something. The capacity to leave a lawful thing on the shelf may be one of the clearest demonstrations that the thing does not rule the heart.

PASTORAL JUDGMENT For me, if I sincerely believe that purchasing or drinking alcohol may damage my witness, the drink is not worth it. That is a personal ministry application of Biblical principles, not a claim that every Christian who purchases a small amount is committing sin.

14. The Person Who Is No Longer Deciding About “a Little”

Truth Before Destruction

Some readers are not weighing an occasional small amount. Alcohol already holds power. Promises to stop have been repeated. Bottles, receipts or quantities have been hidden. Words were spoken and forgotten. Relationships have absorbed apology after apology. For that person, a debate about whether moderate use is theoretically permitted can become another hiding place.

The mastery test gives language for honesty. The issue is not whether someone else can drink responsibly. The issue is whether this person remains free. If alcohol repeatedly overrules

intention, damages responsibilities or demands secrecy, wisdom calls for disclosure, abstinence and help rather than another attempt to prove control.

“And Such Were Some of You”

First Corinthians 6:10 warns that drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God. The warning must not be softened. Verse 11 then says, “And such were some of you.” Paul speaks of people whose former identity and practice did not remain their final condition. They were washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God.

The Gospel offers more than embarrassment and another promise to try harder. It offers forgiveness, a changed standing before God, the presence of the Spirit and a community in which truth can replace secrecy. Seeking help is not proof of weak faith. It may be the first serious act of faith after years of denial.

The Church Must Be Safe for Recovery

A church that preaches against drunkenness must also become a place where a struggling person can speak before the problem becomes public catastrophe. Confidentiality, prayer, accountability, wise medical care and appropriate recovery support can work together. The church should never promise that one prayer removes every craving, and it should never communicate that recurring struggle places someone beyond grace.

GOSPEL HOPE Alcohol may have become part of a person's history. Through Jesus Christ, it does not have to control that person's future. Conviction tells the truth about bondage. Grace makes truth possible without hopelessness.

Conclusion: Liberty Governed by Love

The question “Is drinking a little alcohol OK?” deserves a qualified yes. The Bible recognizes legitimate uses and does not command universal abstinence. That conclusion prevents legalism. It does not grant the Christian permission to stop reasoning.

The believer must ask what is happening to judgment, desire and self-control. The believer must honor conscience and protect another person who may be vulnerable. The believer must consider what family, coworkers, neighbors and unbelievers may learn from the conduct. Above all, the believer must ask whether the choice can be made to the glory of God.

Two Christians may reach different personal practices while submitting to the same Lord. One may conclude that a small amount is lawful and wise in a particular private setting. Another may conclude that complete abstinence is the wisest response to history, responsibility, conscience or witness. Neither should invent a universal command. Both must remain willing to surrender preference to Christ.

The final answer is therefore larger than the glass. Drinking a little alcohol is not automatically a sin. Drunkenness is sin. Bondage is incompatible with liberty. Violating conscience is sin. Weakening another person is contrary to love. Damaging the witness entrusted to us may make a

lawful act spiritually unprofitable. No drink is worth mastery, no drink is worth weakening someone else and no drink is worth damaging the witness God has entrusted to us.

ENDURING COUNSEL Do not condemn what Scripture permits. Do not minimize what Scripture warns can destroy. Let liberty remain under the authority of Christ, let love value another person above preference and let everything eaten or drunk be done to the glory of God.

Selected Sources

Primary Scripture

Genesis 9:20–27; Genesis 19:30–38; Deuteronomy 14:22–26; 1 Samuel 25:36–38; Psalm 104:14–15; Proverbs 20:1; Proverbs 23:29–35; Proverbs 31:4–7; Daniel 5:1–5; Matthew 11:16–19; Mark 15:23; Luke 7:31–35; Luke 10:34; John 2:1–11; Romans 14:21–23; 1 Corinthians 6:9–12; 1 Corinthians 8:1–13; 1 Corinthians 10:23–33; Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:15–18; 1 Timothy 3:7–8; 1 Timothy 5:23. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

Biblical and Interpretive Resources

Blue Letter Bible Hebrew and Greek lexicon entries for yayin, shekar, tirosh, oinos and methuo. Bible Odyssey, Society of Biblical Literature, “Wine.” David Deming, “The Aqueducts and Water Supply of Ancient Rome,” Groundwater, 2020, consulted for general ancient water-supply background. Popular sermon materials supplied during development were used to identify competing arguments and were tested against Scripture rather than adopted as controlling authorities.

Pastoral Note

This commentary provides Biblical interpretation and pastoral application. It does not supply medical advice, a universal safe quantity or a substitute for treatment. A person with a history of dependence, health concerns, medication interactions or uncertainty about safety should seek qualified help and should not use Biblical liberty as a reason to ignore personal danger.